

March 4, 2013

“Hey Spring Happens!”

By Kathie Driscoll

If you're looking out your window and wondering when spring will arrive, then I recommend you grab your wool cap, and go outside to look for it. If you look closely, you will be pleasantly surprised at the subtle signs of spring. Stand under a deciduous tree (aka a tree that drops leaves in the fall) and you'll notice it has already begun its preparation for the arrival of the prodigal sun! The day temperatures that begun to rise in February only to fall back to freezing at night have stirred the tree's fluid circulation of water and nutrients to rise throughout the tree. Maple trees have already started the process and people like myself have capitalized on it by tapping the trees for their sweet nectar. Yes, it is Maple Sugaring time! It is a short period where sap can be extracted as a natural resource. For 4-6 weeks maple trees can be tapped for its sap, collected and boiled down to make maple syrup. I have tapped several mature maple trees this past month, filling over 18 gallons of sap and yielding a mere 5 pints of sweet maple syrup. No worries though, I have not zapped all the sap! Depending on the size of the tree, sap can be extract for about 4 weeks without starving it from its reserves.

Trees are not the only living organisms revealing the subtle signs of spring. There have been reports of salamanders emerging from hibernation. Egg masses have already been discovered in their selected ponds. During the week of February 18, I had the pleasure of being serenaded by spring peepers while walking my dog. This past weekend a group of curious Naturalists observed amplexing wood frogs in a nearby vernal pool. (Really? Is there no privacy?!) Even the poor male woodcock bird has an audience this time of year while desperately trying to attract his mate with his awkward courtship display.

The signs of spring may be subtle but one message is clear and that is, the growing season is upon us. So if you found a little bit of spring in your world and enjoyed the time outside, then consider preparing for the eminent arrival with a Naturalist. Master Naturalist Bea Stryker is offering 2 Frog Watch Training workshops this month at Lynchburg's Main Library to teach how to track frogs by identifying their calls. Saturday, March 9 OR Saturday March 16 from 3- 5pm, participants will learn about the population distribution of these very vocal animals, the different species and their unique “voices.” This workshop is free to the public and is a fun family activity!

If you enjoy getting your hands dirty, then please consider helping this Naturalist with a NEW Kemper Trail garden. I created a sensory garden 5 years ago on the trail across from Nature Zone as part of our sensory hike, landscaping for wildlife and edible plants programs. Unfortunately, the trail was closed off for the Midtown road project and I was unable to get to the garden to prepare it for winter. Thanks to Jerry Whitmore, City of Lynchburg's sweetest, most awesome Public Works employee, we have a new and improved garden bed. I am soliciting volunteers to help fill the bed with dirt, plants and mulch. We need to get the dirt in within the next few weeks (between March 4 and March 22). The dirt will be delivered and we just need to spread it. Please contact me, if you are interested in helping out with this worthwhile project!